



**COMMANDER, U.S. PACIFIC FLEET  
AND  
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

**News Release**

**LINDA LINGLE**  
GOVERNOR

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**REEF WORK PROGRESSES AT GROUNDING SITE**

Civilian divers contracted by the Navy and under the oversight of State of Hawaii aquatic biologists have already reattached more than 2,000 coral colonies that were displaced in the February grounding of the USS Port Royal (CG 73) off Honolulu International Airport's Reef Runway.

"The contractors are making steady progress collecting and reattaching coral colonies," said Rear Adm. Joseph A. Walsh, deputy commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet. "While that work continues, we are preparing for the next phase of work, removal of rubble from the seabed."

Divers began collecting, then reattaching coral on April 29. Since then, the divers have been working seven days a week collecting and reattaching viable coral colonies in the grounding area, about a half-mile offshore. They work from Sea Engineering Inc.'s 74-foot-long Huki Pau, a converted former landing craft, which is tethered to buoys and maneuvers in the work area using electric winches. The divers collect appropriate coral colonies and fragments, then reattach them to solid spots on the bottom with Portland cement mortar.

The effort is being coordinated with the state Department of Land and Natural Resources, whose Division of Aquatic Resources has advised which corals are preferred for reattachment.

"The Department of Land and Natural Resources welcomes the support and cooperation of the U.S. Navy in achieving our mutual goal of protecting the state's marine resources and minimizing further damage to them. The actions we have agreed to are the next step in our continuing response to the impacts of this grounding. In particular, the actions to remove rubble are critical to prevention of further damage to the reef. Future steps will involve identifying projects that can restore damaged reef and replace the loss of coral reef resources," said Laura H. Thielen, DLNR chairperson.

Meanwhile, contractors are mobilizing equipment for the rubble removal. State officials have raised concerns that, if left in place, the rubble could damage the reef when high surf hits the area. In addition to divers placing large rubble into loading nets by hand, contractors will use hydraulic suction devices and an environmental cable arm bucket to remove coral and rock rubble and load it onto barges. Once ashore, the state will use the recovered rubble as fill material for the Reef Runway.

DLNR Chairperson Thielen added, "The state appreciates the Navy's commitment to a timely response in regard to the removal of loose coral rubble, and is working with them to ensure that further damage to the reef habitat is minimized. The southerly summer swells starting this month, could roll the rubble and cause additional damage to the remaining reef, adds an urgency to this action that both parties recognize."

The Navy, state and contractors are watching for the arrival of seasonal high surf, which could limit the coral reattachment and rubble removal, if it threatens worker safety.

"In the meantime, we are doing all we safely can to stabilize the reef environment in the area," said Walsh. "We appreciate the state and the public's cooperation."

Because much of the work is underwater, the Navy and the state are asking the boating public to steer clear of the project area for safety reasons and to prevent further damage to the reef. The area is marked by buoys that are anchored to the bottom at points where the anchors pose no harm to the reef.

Port Royal ran aground the night of Feb. 5, 2009, and was freed early on the morning of Feb. 9.

Repairs to the 567-foot guided missile cruiser are continuing at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard. The Navy investigation into the grounding is continuing through review and endorsement by the chain of command and is not yet final.

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**Editors:**

Still photos and video of the coral work are available at the following website:

<http://www.cpf.navy.mil/subsite/transfer/transfer.html>

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